From design studio to research laboratory: An interior design contribution to urban regeneration studies

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This paper describes the transformation of a design studio into a research laboratory to contribute to built-environment knowledge. Borrowing concepts of meta-analysis and systemic review, a decade’s worth of interior design proposals, completed as part of an interior design programme, are analysed.

This study is positioned within the Honours degree programme at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, and structured around a project-based learning pedagogy. The learning outcomes of the programme requires of students to identify spatial problems confronting users of the city and propose how interior design can be used to address these problems. A ‘solution’ to the problem is presented in the form of a design proposal aimed at improving the lives of the urban inhabitants.

There are many real-world problems present in the city as a result of spatial and socio-economic developments, presenting a variety of sites with which the students can engage. The methodology used by the students is a pragmatic world-view approach to problem-solving, and a mixed-methods research design, largely dependent on empirical methods, context analysis, and supported by theoretical principles.

Approximately 100 design proposals produced from 2010 to 2020 will be analysed using meta-analysis to draw wider conclusions from quantitative and qualitative, experimental research studies and to develop a more cumulative knowledge-base.
Data extracted from the students’ proposals is analysed primarily according to the ‘problem statement’ and ‘the aim of the study’ - generally stated as: “to produce a design proposal for...”. Subsequently, locations are mapped, existing building typologies, heritage status, the nature of the identified problems, proposed interior typologies and revitalization approaches, are categorised.

The findings have potential value in: making the design studio function as a research laboratory, establishing a database for incoming students, and for: entrepreneurs, urban planners and developers, architects, designers, researchers, and academics in the built-environment field.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Andrew Gill qualified with an Mtech degree in Interior Design at the Witwatersrand Technikon in 2002. He has been involved in design education for 30 years, teaching at both an undergraduate and postgraduate level. He is currently employed at the University of Johannesburg in the faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, in the Interior Design department as a senior lecturer and researcher. He is also responsible for the development and coordination of the newly introduced BA Hons Degree programme. Andrew has always considered design as a creative problem-solving tool, that can be used to improve the quality of life for all, and this premise forms the foundation of his teaching philosophy.

Sadiyah Geyer has built up over nine years of industry experience and is highly skilled in the execution of interior design projects, focusing on conceptual development, technical documentation, project management and administration. She has a deep passion for working with people, designing to contribute to the amelioration of society and creating spaces that provide maximum user comfort and efficiency, with minimal impact on the environment. She believes she can share her knowledge and passion for people and design with aspiring, young designers and has joined the University of Johannesburg in the faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, in the Interior Design department as a lecturer, which she sees as an energizing and rewarding step in her career. She is currently completing her MA (Design) qualification at the University of Johannesburg, having received her B-tech. Interior Design degree, Cum Laude, in 2009. Her research focuses on urban regeneration strategies through the implementation of interior design as a creative industry.